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ABSTRACT

This study investigated instructional practices in a literacy methods course in a teacher education program that was developing a reflective and integrated approach to university courses and school experiences. Along with coursework, students plan and teach lessons for children in a partnership school in which teachers have begun the process of holistic curricular change. Reflective practice is interwoven throughout the course as students respond in journals to course content and the effectiveness of their lessons, children's learning, their own professional learning, and life in schools. An initial study involving three outstanding preservice students was followed by a study involving nine outstanding and average preservice students. Findings revealed that: the co-constructed syllabus did not meet students' needs; the majority of students did not find journal writing to be personally helpful; students responded positively to small group work within class sessions, demonstration lessons, and parallels between the methods class and the kind of teaching advocated for young children; and students' concerns after having classroom experience centered around classroom management and meeting individual needs. Implications for teacher education are discussed. The appendixes contain information about the research design, the field experience, and group interviews. (Contains 34 references.) (JDD)

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Exploring Preservice Students' Perceptions of Literacy Instruction: Listening to Students

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Exploring Preservice Students' Perceptions of Literacy Instruction: Listening to Students

Background

Recent educational reform efforts have stressed the need for schools to become caring settings in which constructivist learning guides educational practice (Eisner, 1993; Goodlad, 1990; The Holmes Group, 1990; Noddings, 1991). Principles of best practice for teachers of kindergarten and primary children are outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987) which recommends that learning experiences for children should include warm, secure opportunities for active, constructivist learning; should provide opportunities for interaction with peers and adults; and, should be built across integrated curricular areas. Furthermore, children's early literacy experiences should be based on their prior knowledge of print and provide opportunities to support growth through sustained experiences in reading and writing meaningful text (Goodman, 1989).

For such substantial educational change to develop, teachers must understand the constructivist principles undergirding the reform movement. And, importantly, learning to teach must be conceived as a process in which preservice students actively connect knowledge learned in college classrooms with the process of teaching in school classrooms (Goodlad, 1990). Current research emphasizes the need for teacher educators to consider how an individual preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs about teaching guides and shapes each students development of pedagogical knowledge (Richardson, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Floden,

1986). This approach toward teacher education would necessitate knowledge of individual students as learners and an interactive approach toward classroom learning (Morimoto, 1987). However, college coursework is essentially transmissive (Short & Burke, 1989; Hollingsworth, 1989a) in which content is planned and delivered by instructors without consideration of how individual students are personally integrating course content.

Prior research has found that preservice students' concerns do not typically match with content presented in educational coursework. Methods courses are not viewed as primary sources of learning. Rather, preservice students typically are more concerned with surviving the student teaching experience which is perceived as the setting in which they will "really learn to teach" than in learning methods course content (Fuller, 1969; Griffin, 1981).

Research findings on student teaching are also problematic for teacher educators. Studies have shown that student teachers become quickly socialized into traditional ways of teaching as they begin to follow the model demonstrated by their cooperating teachers (Lortie, 1975; White, 1989). When learning to teach is perceived as an apprenticeship in which the novice learns from the experienced teacher, educational coursework which focuses on newer understandings of learning is easily dismissed (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981). Furthermore, preservice teachers view the teaching profession and the roles of the teacher through the lens developed during their own experiences as students in classrooms.(Lortie, 1975). It would appear that when learning to

teach is based on an apprenticeship model and filtered through preservice students' past experiences in schools that college coursework has little impact on how new teachers begin to teach.

However, recent work has begun to question if the traditional apprenticeship model holds true for all. Goodman (1988) found in a group of 10 highly selected student teachers a variety of teaching behaviors which ranged from overt compliance -- in which the student teachers quickly adjusted their behavior and beliefs to resemble those of their cooperating teachers; to efforts in which the students made small changes within the curriculum; to transformative actions in which the students significantly restructured the learning experiences for the children they taught. When these student teachers believed they had freedom to be innovative, they often were able to make valued and substantive changes while student teaching in a traditional classroom. Furthermore, Hollingsworth (1989a; 1989b) found that when some student teachers were placed in classroom environments where experimentation and innovation were encouraged and supported, that these students were able to develop ways of teaching consistent with the knowledge gained in university coursework. Basic support for innovative student teaching included a good knowledge of instructional strategies learned in methods courses and support for developing classroom management from the cooperating teacher.

A new emphasis within the field of teacher education redefines the process of learning to teach from that of an apprenticeship model to one of reflective practice in which students are encouraged to thoughtfully consider their plans and

actions in light of goals and purposes of education (Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Ross, 1987; Schon, 1983). An assumption inherent within the reflective approach is that as preservice students come to understand their own choices and work, they will learn to take control of their own emerging teaching practice. From a reflective perspective teaching involves the creation of curriculum within a particular classroom context. This perspective is compatible with constructivist learning principles which views good teaching as that which begins with an understanding of students' knowledge, not with the implementation of packaged curriculum (Richardson, 1990). From this perspective teaching is viewed as problematic -- the continuing development of practice through informed problem solving.

Developing a reflective problem solving curriculum is not an easy task. Reflective thinking is much more than another skill to be learned, but a disposition to be developed about the process of teaching (Richardson, 1990). A reflective inquiry based teacher education program often clashes with preservice students' perceptions of learning to teach. Preservice students expect to learn specific teaching techniques which will help them survive in classrooms; a direct contrast to framing learning to teach as continuous problem solving and consideration of goals and ethics. (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Furthermore, research by Kitchener and King (1981) suggests that many young adults have not yet developed conceptual levels which enables them to engage in multiple problem solving in a complex setting. Other writers have identified problems in how educational coursework is

"delivered" as barriers to developing reflective practice. The typical college course format in which individual instructors develop a syllabus based on their expertise for individual courses does not provide a model of integrative, constructivist practice for our students. Programs of instruction need to be developed around integrative themes (Ross, 1990) and provide an integration of thinking and action in course and field work (Gitlin, 1987). And, importantly, we as teacher educators need to model constructive, reflective practice as we work with preservice students (Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

The purpose of this study is to investigate our own instructional practice as we attempt to develop a reflective and integrated teacher education program. As teachers of early childhood and literacy education we encourage our preservice students to learn about their young students as individuals. In this action research we attempt to do what we expect our students to do; to begin to understand our preservice students as learners.

Method

Setting

The first step in the process of changing our Early Childhood teacher education program has been to develop a conceptual basis for a coherent thematic program (Bruneau & Ambrose, 1991) which is based on the research literature supporting developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987), holistic literacy instruction (Goodman, 1989) and reflective teacher education (Schon, 1987). We hope to achieve this goal through integrating our university courses and through

integrating our coursework with authentic experiences in schools (Ross, 1990). We are, however, just beginning our transition. We are currently teaching in a traditional model in which students complete a series of individual methods courses. Our students go on to student teach in a variety of available settings in which instructional practice ranges from traditional skills-based learning to classrooms in which teachers have begun the transition process to constructivist learning. We observe in our student teachers the range of behavior described by Goodman (1988) from strict compliance to transformative change as they work in classrooms. Our goal is to prepare more students to be transformative change agents as they begin their professional careers.

Our research has focused on our literacy course, Developmental Reading and Writing: The Early Years. The course is designed around the following learning goals: developing an understanding of the process of emergent literacy development and assessment (McGee & Richgels, 1990); developing strategies to facilitate a process writing program (Graves, 1983); and, developing strategies which engage young children in interactive experiences with literature in a print rich environment (McGee & Richgels, 1990). Along with coursework students have an opportunity to plan and teach lessons for children in one of our partnership schools in which teachers have begun the process of holistic curricular change. Reflective practice is interwoven throughout the course as students respond in journals to course content and and also reflect on the effectiveness of their

lessons, children's learning, their own professional learning, and, life in schools.

During the past two years the course instructor (who is one of the researchers) has begun to make changes within the course, especially as interest in the course has grown among teachers in the partnership school. Students now spend more time working in classrooms and a small amount of the sessions are taught by the primary teachers. However, the major format for course delivery remains transmissive.

We began our line of inquiry during the 1991-92 academic year with a year long study of 3 preservice students in which we asked the following questions:(1) What were the students learning from their reading methods class? (2) What strategies or literacy processes were the students able to implement in student teaching?; (3) What concerns or questions did the students have throughout the year?; and, (4) How did the students perceive themselves as learners of their new profession? (Bruneau, Dunlap, & Ruttan, 1992). We found that these three students did learn to use a variety of strategies from their literacy methods course and were later to make transformative changes in their student teaching experiences. The students told us they learned from observing models of literacy instruction presented by the course instructor and they valued the clarity of this method of teaching. They also described self directed learning through talking about teaching with their peers, with other teachers whom they knew personally, through observing teacher models in other field experiences, and in using the field experiences to experiment with a variety of teaching strategies. Two of the

students were able to implement language experience activities and daily journal writing within their skills-based kindergarten student teaching classrooms and the third was able to change the complete instructional pattern of the class from teacher-directed to center-based work. Although their student teaching was transformative, we also found they worried about survival issues-- being liked by children and their cooperating teachers -- as reported in the literature. The students related that they felt most comfortable in "trying-out " changes in instruction when they knew their cooperating teachers would be out of the classroom.

Although these findings reflected positive learning from the course as well as positive student transformative action during student teaching, it also raised further concerns which frame our present investigation. Our initial study, as did Goodman's (1988) focused on three outstanding students who inherently seemed to view teaching as problem solving and curriculum building. We began to wonder how more typical students might be making sense of the course and field work. Secondly, our first study was limited to interviews which were conducted at mid-term and at the end of the course and student teaching experiences. We wished to understand how the students were perceiving the course while actually involved in the course -- to find perceptions in process. And, thirdly, the instructor planned to implement changes in the course format which included involving students in the co-constructing of the syllabus, active modeling by the instructor of reflecting on practice which

included talking openly about changes in her own instruction; beginning class with students' sharing among small groups and across the class from their own journal writing; organizing small group seminar discussions to reflect upon the field experiences; and, inviting students to volunteer to participate in an newly formed integrated field experience with students from other methods courses -- our first effort at integrating across college coursework.

Data Collection

To collect data in action on our own college teaching is somewhat problematic due to the ethical and power relations which exist between a professor and students who receive a grade from the professor. We designed a research team in which a doctoral student served as the primary researcher whose responsibilities included the recording of field notes of class and seminar sessions and serving as the interviewer in a series of audio-taped open-ended group interviews (Spradley, 1979). We chose group interviews as a means of recording our students' oral inquiry process (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993) as a means which would enable the students to participate in sharing their multiple perspectives about what they were learning. We hoped to learn as they talked with one another. Group interviews which were conducted after the first three weeks of the course and after the first round of observation and/or teaching in schools comprise the data for this report. We are currently in process of collecting additional data (Appendix A) which will be used in developing a more fine-grained case study of the individual students, whom we will follow throughout their student teaching,

as well as continued changes in the course and field experiences.

Data Analysis

Data from the group interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the primary researcher and two additional doctoral students. Each member of the team analyzed the interview data separately through inductive analysis searching for relevant themes (Erickson, 1986). Through group discussion the three researchers identified common themes, cited evidence for the themes, and searched for disconfirming evidence. The instructor was a listening member of the analysis team. In this way the instructor was able to get feedback on the course without knowledge of individual student participation.

Participants

Nine preservice students volunteered to participate in this study. Four students volunteered upon our first request. Our prior knowledge of the students indicated that this first group of volunteers were representative of more outstanding students -- verbal and somewhat comfortable with ambiguity and risk-taking -- as were the students in our first study. The primary researcher then individually invited five additional students to join the study. These students were selected because they had done more average work in previous classes. Once, personally invited, the four additional students readily agreed to participate.

Our nine students are representative of our preservice population and equal about one fourth of the class of thirty-seven students. Eight are undergraduate students, six of whom are in their early twenties. Two undergraduate students are

older students who have raised their own families. One student, the only male in the study, is a Master's student seeking certification in education. All will student teach during the next semester.

The nine students were placed in two interview groups. Group A includes the five students who also volunteered to be part of the newly created integrated field experience. (See Appendix B for a description of the field experiences).This group includes the one Master's student, the two nontraditional undergraduate students, and two undergraduate students. The four original volunteers are in this group. Group B consists of four undergraduate students who were each individually invited to participate in the study.

Findings

The findings represent our students perceptions early-on in the class. The first interviews, which were held three weeks into the semester occurred just prior to the students beginning their field experience. The second interviews provide insight into the students' feelings after they have begun to work in the field.

Reflections on the College Class

Strategies which do not match with student perceptions.The students shared a variety of viewpoints regarding the structure of the class which included perspectives on journal writing, self-selected reading, group work, and demonstration lessons. However, they all agreed the co-constructed syllabus did not meet their needs at all. The instructor had developed a syllabus

which was organized around topics of inquiry such as literacy development and process writing. Under each topic were spaces left for student generated questions. The syllabus also provided an overview of assignments (portfolios which were to include journal writing, reflections on teaching, and summaries of self-selected readings; and a final unit plan). Due dates for the portfolio submissions were not specified because the instructor was still negotiating the field dates with both schools. The instructor had hoped this open-ended syllabus would involve students in designing their own curriculum. However, all nine students found no value in the co-constructed syllabus. The students' perspective was that a syllabus is only useful if it helps organize one's time. All but one student said they needed dates to organize their time. One student commented, "No dates, nothing to look at." Another student added that the syllabus," Had left open spaces -- I didn't pay attention." The students cited their heavy schedule and need to plan ahead, "Adjust for heavy and light weeks." "My time is so scheduled I need to know when this is due and when this is due and when to be starting." One student who indicated her life was planned through next August stated, "I need to put it (assignments) on my calendar."

Although journal writing is frequently recommended as an activity that facilitates the development of reflective thinking (Ross, 1987), the majority of our students stated they did not find it personally helpful. We learned that many of our students were writing journals for four classes in one semester. The students complained of being, "journaled out." One student conceded, " One journal may be meaningful, but so many I just

can't keep track." However, three students, one an initial volunteer and two students whom we had invited, expressed positive comments about journaling for one class. Journals help to, "Sort it out -- where I stand," "Use to reflect and focus thoughts," and, "Give you a chance to think back on what you did in that class instead of just walking out the door and ... forgetting about it.. You think about it." Another student stated she found the journal helped her, "Get your beliefs in order..develop your philosophy... realize what you really believe." However, she then related that once she had written her beliefs she found herself, "Writing the same old thing over and over because you know what you believe." One student who did not like to write class journals thought it would be helpful in reflecting on her teaching, "You go back and you reflect on what happened. You go over it later and say, "Gee, I could try this....but right now when it's just class...." Two students did not believe that even teaching journals would be useful and one commented quite vividly, "I hate to write. I just write stupid stuff...I would never go back...it's more like busy work."

The students were also divided in their opinions about the value of learning from both a required packet of readings and from the self-selected reading they were required to do. "Unless it's something I'm interested in I don't want to read it, " one student commented and another agreed, "I'd wish they'd be more selective about all those packets." In contrast two other students liked the self-selected reading with one student describing how she used her choices to, "Continually clear up

some of the questions and confirmation of ideas." As second student related the readings to current and future development, "It forces us to constantly dig and expose ourselves to new ideas.... we professional educators we have to be committed throughout our career to growth."

Strategies which better met student learning needs. The students responded positively about three aspects of the class for which we did not specifically probe. Four students commented favorably on small group work within class sessions as valued ways in which they learned from others, "You share your ideas," In whole group you only get certain people's ideas," and, "We coordinate ideas, we must do that when we teach," were all comments which reflected favorably on small group process. Five students reported they liked the demonstration lessons, "We actually see the theories and the processes she's telling us about right in action," and,"When she teaches like she'd really teach, I don't see that enough." Despite the fact that the students liked the modeled lesson one student cautioned " But I don't know if I'd want that (demonstrations) too much, because I don't want to be spoon fed." And, three students described parallels they perceived between the class and the kind of teaching advocated for young children, "We're getting taught in much the same way we're getting asked to teach, " summarized one student while two other students commented that the course portfolio assessment was a model for assessing their own students.

Student Concerns. Despite favorable comments about the class, several students indicated they did not view methods courses as

meeting their needs. One student stated explicitly, "I think we need to be in the classroom a lot more than we are." And another student stated, "We could take methods classes for the rest of our lives...Unless you use it and use it very soon...it's very important getting into schools." A third student summarized, "What teaches you to teach is practice, practice, practice." Experience needs to be,"Real teaching", all day teaching." And a fourth suggested, "I think you should spend the semester before student teaching as a teaching assistant, that way you'd be more ready." All seemed to agree that they believed they needed extended classroom experiences.

Surviving student teaching was clearly an issue for these students at the beginning of their last semester of coursework. Two expressed what might be considered a mild worry about student teaching, "...feel somewhat unprepared, somewhat intimidated by student teaching" . Others expressed much more concern, "You know I could pass any test they throw at me, but when it comes to actual teaching, I could never go out right now," and, " I feel like I'm teetering on the edge... will I fall flat on my face?" represented stronger concern. Those students who expressed the most concern about student teaching seemed to be the most impatient to get into the schools and, "Practice, practice, practice."

Two specific concerns expressed about student teaching included a concern about planning for a a whole day, "I'm learning bits and pieces," "I need to do this for a whole day." and working with students who have difficulty. Several asked for

more information on special needs students. The students appeared to classify children into two groups, "Those who learn and those who do not learn," and worried about how to work with children who needed extra support. Concerns about their ability to assess children, "At this point I'm questioning my skills for determining where children are at in their development in reading writing, " and "I want more of a foundation (about stages of development)," were expressed. Students were also concerned about, "How do I report not only where they are now but what they've done," as well as advocate for change, "How do I convince administrators and other teachers?," were expressed within concerns about the nature of literacy development.

The students concern for children's literacy development was interesting because recent class sessions had focused on just that topic. The students were beginning to use labels of novice and experimenter (adopted from the McGee & Richgels, 1990 text). However, they seemed to use the labels together as in,"I'm more confident in determining a novice and experimenter when I see a child who is scribbling." How our students will continue to develop an understanding of these labels (which we perceive as a helpful heuristic in assessing emerging literacy development) will be interesting to explore as the study progresses.

And finally, several students began to question their ability to teach from a "holistic perspective" when their own school experiences had been so different. Four students commented that whole language was not part of their educational background, "We didn't grow up that way," "This is not how we were taught, and"I'm a big phonics person," were all cautious

statements reflecting some doubt about whether their methods course instruction would really work in classrooms.

After the First Lesson

The second round of interviews were conducted during the time period when the students were working in the schools. Findings reported in this section are taken from Group A, the group working in the experimental integrated field setting. The students had previously observed for two mornings and had just completed their first morning of team teaching without the presence of the classroom teacher. Of the five participants only one worked in a classroom where the children had previously experienced journal writing. Two participants worked in a very teacher-directed classroom and the other two worked in a classroom where the teacher provided many open-ended experiences but was struggling with classroom management. All were teaching in kindergarten classrooms with enrollments of thirty or more children. This session was primarily a "reflection on action" (Schon, 1983)as the students shared their struggle for classroom management, found literacy activities to be engaging for kindergarten children, and reflected on their sense of ownership and positive feelings about working cooperatively together.

Reflections on the morning. The interview began with our students talking excitedly and enthusiastically about their morning, "It was great," "It went well," It was a little chaotic but I didn't care," and, "It was chaos...but productive chaos," were opening comments. The students began to focus on management -- trying to define "productive chaos" and beginning to view the

classroom from the teacher's perspective, "How does one teacher do this with 30 children?" and "I guess I look at her (the highly structured classroom teacher) differently now." The two students who worked in the structured classroom described the difficulty the children encountered with a change of expectations, "I think they were confused with all their...choices...they had a hard time handling that." And, "When the teacher came back in they started raising their hands. They listen to her."

The students described how they struggled a bit to capture the children's attention. One student related the following strategies that she used, "We did an LEA chart and they were kind of loud at first, and then like they were having a hard time paying attention...and then I did a fingerplay....they had a hard time focusing in until we sang." A second student attributed her ability to get attention to luck, " I kept saying you have to listen, you have to listen, I was lucky with the story because it was Polar Bear, Polar Bear. Do they have anymore books like that?" The students shared more strategies such as saying, "One, two, three, eyes on me," and another related that turning the lights off didn't work because, "I guess it's a signal they're not familiar with." As they talked, the students became aware that in planning to teach they had to think of not only what they would teach, but how they would engage the children in the planned activities.

One student described success in working with a child who was deemed "problematic" through journal writing. The discussion then turned to successes the students had with classroom

management once the children became engaged in literacy activities. Journal writing, literacy props in centers, and group language experience charts were all credited as being ways that work at engaging students. Once the management value had been described, the conversation turned to actual child learning within the literacy activity. The student continued her story about engaging the boy for management reasons, but now focused on his literacy learning. "He asked me if I would take a story and so I took dictation, he was really engaged. I wrote the word tree and he said that's just like my name (Lee)." Two students then asked for clarification of how the first student was able to, "Explain they could dictate a story to you."As more examples of journal writing were shared, one student concluded, "They have a long way to go. They need more of these experiences."

Reflections on Learning When the students asked what they learned that day, the first comment was again about classroom management, "I look at it different, it's different when you're in there trying to control the children and they're just not used to you...it's frustrating." One student saw validation for allowing children freedom, "They really want to express their own ideas; I think the structure was inhibiting them." "A third student described seeing ideas from the literacy class in action, "It's always been in our minds how you would teach a class when we hear all this stuff but now it really does work." A fourth student related her pleasure with establishing dictation but went on to say, "I need to learn how to scaffold...I need to learn what to scaffold," as she thought about what to do next.

Several students described developing ownership for the classroom. Two students were excited to have this children call them by names. Another student stated, "I feel it's a lot easier when you feel you have ownership. I felt if she (the teacher) had been in the room I would have felt I should be doing...what (the teacher) wanted." Two students stated they had been introduced as, "V and Y are going to do some fun activities with you today, I don't want to be known as the fun teachers. This is serious business and they're learning from us."

Four students stated how positive they thought the teamed approach was, "I might be a little more nervous if I was by myself," This is my first experience team teaching and I love it." One student concluded, "It can be done. And now we're going to have to do it again next week ... to build on it." The interview ended as the students began to think about planning for their next session.

Finishing the First Rotation

In contrast to the first group, the second group of students had just finished a cycle of observing and assisting in kindergarten and primary classrooms. Upon completion of this cycle the class was to return to the university to begin a 3 week cycle of "methods classes." The students in this group, like the first group, now viewed teaching as more problematic. However, major concerns expressed by this group centered around meeting individual needs of children with diverse literacy abilities as well as balancing the kinds of teaching they would like to do with the classroom activities planned by the cooperating field teacher.

Children are so different. Clearly the biggest issue for this group of students was the range of literacy learning they observed in the children. "There's so many different levels...you have to meet individual needs...it's hard to feed the one's that don't get it and challenge the ones that are above," summarized one student. Another added, "They're real children. I mean twenty -seven kids you can't group them into A,B, C, & D -- there's such a wide variety." A third student commented, "I spent a long time last night trying to think of a book I could read that the whole class would enjoy and understand, and it's really hard. You don't think about that when you're sitting in the classroom."

The students also wondered how would they be able to teach to this range of children. "I don't quite know how to deal with a child who says, "How do you read this?" Another student reflected on her need to better connect with students, "I was working with the slower ones and it lost it's meaning." Still another student was unsure of how to deal with different responses, "They're guessing all the wrong letters and I'm like -- this isn't going anywhere." Specific ways of interacting with children was of great concern, especially the integration of phonics into children's experiences with print.

Returning to the college course. The students appeared to reluctantly agree that they needed more information about working with children. "I feel like now that we're going back to class, I've already been spoiled -- I've been in the schools, it's a little depressing, but if it's different ideas that we could

apply to the school then I think it's beneficial because we're kind of hanging." As the student's nodded agreement another student stated, "I think the class will be more purposeful." A third student hoped there would be time for more discussions, "Because we have specific questions." Another student added that she hoped they have opportunity to "share experiences and different teachers." The students liked the seminars which followed their classroom experiences, these sessions built on their question and concerns. The students seemed to want a balance between getting more information and sharing their class experiences. Two of the students thought the class would give them an opportunity to, "step back and think about their experiences." The other two students really wished to stay at the school and "practice."

Although the group reluctantly believed returning to coursework might be helpful, "I think it's better to do than to be told, it's not the same, it's actually doing it, it's the experience," the students agreed that "traditional coursework had no appeal. ""But now the portfolio and all that, It just seems petty because we've been in the school." All students agreed they wished only for information that could be applied in their setting. Two of the students talked about integrating their class and school based knowledge, "We're doing this stuff and we don't realize that what we're doing we learned in the (college) classroom. In contrast, sometimes course information did not make sense to students, "I don't view them as novices, I see them as real children, commented one student. "It's easier for me to learn by doing and seeing than by hearing. I just want to

practice it and do it and do it and do it."

Observing Teacher Models. The four students talked at length about their perceptions of their classroom teachers. One student excitedly described the model of integrated learning experiences she had observed, "Ours doesn't separate it, we're talking about the calendar and they do math and reading and phonics and everything." This student said loved to watch the teacher, "She's so enthusiastic.... That's what I need more of, to watch her and then get a chance to do it."

The other three students were in classrooms which teachers were trying whole language activities, but did so in a more direct-teaching fashion. One student commented on a craft project, "It's her way or the wrong way." A second student saw things she liked and disliked about the way her teacher taught, "Some of her things are fantastic, but some other aspects -- it bothers me." The third student stated, "A lot of what I see in the classroom is good and a lot of it isn't, I just don't benefit that much from it....I mean I have plenty of time to sit in classrooms when I graduate to see the wrong if I want to." The overall concern for these three students involved planning future lessons -- should they plan according to how they were taught at the university or how the teacher was currently teaching in her classroom.

Reflections on Our Learning From Students

Although we have examined just a small part of our data one implication seems quite clear; we must take the time to listen to what the students are saying about their learning. What we learned from our group of nine students, was that they were all

serious and dedicated toward becoming good teachers. Even those who did not see much value in learning about teaching in college courses and in completing assignments in an outstanding manner were highly interested in becoming successful teachers. The apprenticeship model; learning as you worked in schools was highly valued.

An examination of what students valued in the apprenticeship model provides guidance for program improvement. The students talked about needing to view the whole picture of life in schools, to begin to understand how lessons come together both during a single day and across the weeks of the school year. Our present model of instruction does not meet this need. Findings from this study support our intentions to replace our separate courses with a more thematic integrated approach toward learning.

Findings from the study also inform changes which can be made within the literacy course. The students valued their field work and the seminars which were held right after working in classrooms. The students also told us they had specific questions based on their field work that they wanted addressed. Building the syllabus from field-based questions, forming inquiry oriented groups based on student concerns, and finding ways to connect reading and journaling with these collaborative concerns may be promising means of connecting information from the college course with work in the field. Building on student observations that children are so different and student concerns about how they can teach to these differences may be a valuable ways to connect an action research project with our students' concerns to

grow in ability to interact with children.

Further studying the strengths and weaknesses of our two different field experiences will be an important next step. Even with this preliminary data the student owned learning lab which was created in the kindergarten building holds promise for future development. Within this setting students struggled with the "whole" of teaching. They did not have the classroom teacher to support their efforts; nor did they have the classroom teacher to evaluate their efforts. This freedom appears to hold promise for providing a learning activity which highly involved action and reflection on action.

The students in the traditional field experience also provide us with important questions to explore. Certainly the need for appropriate models is raised. However, how we can help students learn to dialogue with teachers whose viewpoints are different is an important area of professional learning. This kind of field experience appears to allow students opportunity to observe, critique, design, and negotiate curriculum. As we learn more from our students about this experience we can be better informed in supporting learning in this type of realistic school setting.

The process of studying our own students has just begun. Clearly, we have much more systematic data collection and analysis to explore. Our research process has become highly important as we attempt to understand our own practice. In addition to our systematic data collection, we are finding the process, itself, is supporting our taking time to listen more carefully to all of our students -- our teaching appears to be

more interactive as we systematically reflect on our practice.

Appendix A

Research Design for Investigating Our Teacher Education Practice

Initial Study: 1991,1992 Three Preservice Students

Research Questions:

What are our students learning in the literacy methods class?
What curricular changes are they able to implement in student teaching?
What concerns do students express during coursework semester and during student teaching?
How do the students perceive themselves learning to teach?

Data Collection
Open Ended Interviews:

Coursework semester: midterm, end of term
Student teaching semester: mid and end of kindergarten placement; mid and end of primary placement

Current Investigation, Fall Semester 1993
Nine Preservice Students

Research questions:

What sense are the students making of their coursework?
How are students integrating course and field work?
How do students perceive changes in course delivery?
co-constructed syllabus, reflective seminars, college instructor modeling reflecting on practice, integrated field experience?

Data Collection

Preservice Students: Interviews
3 group interviews throughout semester
1 individual interview: end of course

Artifacts
coursework which includes journals, lesson plans and reflections, and independent reading, statement of learning goals

Research Assistant: Field notes of class and seminars
Reflective journal

Course Instructor:	Reflective journal Teaching materials
All Students:	Open-ended survey of the traditional and integrated field experience

Follow-Up Study -- Student Teaching -- Spring 1994

Preservice Students:	5 interviews spaced throughout semester student teaching observations lesson plans, reflective journal
Course Instructor:	Continuation of Reflective Course Journal as course is retaught

Appendix B

Description of the Field Experiences

Traditional Field Experiences

The School: A suburban kindergarten through second grade partnership school in which teachers have begun to use whole language strategies especially use of literature to teach reading. All use some type of daily writing. However, only 1 classroom follows the process writing cycle from drafting to publishing. The kindergarten teachers engage children in literacy through charted poems and especially find our students to be useful assistants in helping to establish open-ended journal writing.

The Format: Two or three preservice students are assigned to each teacher. The students have an option to plan lessons together, although most prefer to work individually with their own small group of children. The students participate for approximately 1 and 1/2 hours twice weekly in 3 two week rotations.

Rotation 1:	Three weeks into semester Students are to observe children & instruction Assist teachers --e.g. help with writing, listening to individual children, helping at centers.
Rotation 2:	About mid-term Students continue assisting teachers Are encouraged to develop own plans to begin to experiment with teaching
Rotation 3:	End of term Students design their own unit of instruction and teach to their group

Teachers work in classrooms with individuals or small groups while the preservice students are in the rooms. The preservice students share their plans with the classroom teachers and receive feedback on the work they do from the classroom teachers. The course instructor and doctoral student observe students -- offer suggestions. The twenty students in this assignment are divided into two groups which meet once weekly for an informal seminar in which they talk about their observations and teaching.

Integrated Field Experience

The School: A rural-suburban partnership school which contains six all-day kindergarten classrooms with an enrollment of over 30 children in each classroom. The official literacy program revolves around the letter of the week. Two of the teachers use more holistic instruction and down-play the weekly letter. The other 4 teachers teach the program explicitly. Only 1 classroom had been involved in journal writing prior to the field experience which began in early October.

The Format: Three preservice students were assigned as a team to each classroom. One or two members of the team were reading class members who were in their last semester of coursework. The other member(s) were students enrolled in a Guidance or a Kindergarten methods course and were not as far along in their program. The students were to work together once weekly to plan instruction for the children for 1 and 1/2 hours. While the students were in the classrooms the kindergarten teachers met for a period of staff development. The university instructor and doctoral students served as assistants to the KSU students, often providing support with individual guidance of children. Afterwards the students met, primarily as classroom teams, to reflect on their work and plan for the next week. The experience was held on Friday mornings. The preservice students observed the classroom teacher during the first two sessions and then the preservice teams "took-over" instruction for the remaining 5 sessions. The students shared their plans with the teachers; but only received feedback from the university instructors who did so in a facilitative, not evaluative manner.

Appendix C

Group Interviews

Open ended questions were selected from this list which seemed most relevant at the time of the interview to the students' most recent experiences. Questions were added to help inform instruction. For example, after the students completed the first round of field experience they were asked what they would like to do in their college class sessions.

1. Talk about the class.

   What are you learning? How?
   What questions do you have?
   What do you worry about?

2. Talk about the field experience?

   What are you learning about teaching?
   What are you learning about children?
   What are you learning about yourselves as a teacher?
   How do you prepare for the field?
   What feedback do you get? What would you like?

3. What are your concerns as you complete this class?
4. How can we better meet your learning needs?

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